

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CEBU 32

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, RP
SUBJECT: INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA ELECTION PROSPECTS - REGION XI

1. SUMMARY: 33 CANDIDATES HAVE FILED FOR THE 10 SEATS AT STAKE IN THE APRIL 7 INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA (IBP) ELECTION IN REGION XI OF SOUTHEASTERN MINDANAO. THE PRO-MARCOS KBL (NEW SOCIETY MOVEMENT) IS FIELDING A STRONG SLATE OF 10 CANDIDATES. THE ONLY SUBSTANTIAL OPPOSITION TO THE KBL IN REGION XI IS THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE, WHICH MAY HAVE AN OUTSIDE CHANCE OF WINNING ONE OR POSSIBLE TWO SEATS IN THE IBP. (THERE IS SOME QUESTION AS TO HOW "REAL" THIS OPPOSITION IS.) APPROXIMATELY 13 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES ARE ALSO MAKING THE RACE, BUT NONE ARE CONSIDERED SERIOUS CONTENDERS. THE VOTE TOTALS OF SEVERAL OF THE KBL CANDIDATES, AS WELL AS SEVERAL OF THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE CANDIDATES, MAY INDICATE TO MANILA WHICH LOCAL POLITICAL FACTIONS ARE STRONGEST AND HOW DEEPLY AREA RESIDENTS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

2. CONSOFF TOURED ELECTORAL REGION XI WEEK OF FEBRUARY 20 TO OBSERVE ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS WHILE EMBOFF MADE BRIEF VISIT TO AREA WEEK OF MARCH 6. REGION XI CONSISTS OF THE FIVE PROVINCES OF SOUTHEASTERN MINDANAO (SOUTH COTABATO, DAVAO DEL SUR, DAVAO ORIENTAL, DAVAO
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DEL NORTE SURIGAO DEL SUR) PLUS DAVAO CITY AND GENERAL SANTOS CITY.

3. THE KBL SLATE. OF THE 33 CANDIDATES WHO FILED FOR THE 10 INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA SEATS IN REGION XI, THE 10 CANDIDATES OF THE PRO-MARCOS KBL APPEAR TO BE THE STRONGEST SLATE. THE KBL SLATE REPRESENTS A BLENDING OF POWERFUL

(AND DIVERSE) REGIONAL POLITICAL FACTIONS, INTO WHAT ONE DAVAO CITY COLUMNIST DESCRIBED AS A "TICKET OF CONVENIENCE."

4. MOST PROMINENT AMONG THE 10 KBL CANDIDATES ARE FORMER DAVAO GOVERNOR/FORMER SENATOR ALEJANDRO ALMENDRAS, WHO IS HEADING THE KBL TICKET; RODOLFO DEL ROSARIO, BROTHER-IN-LAW OF NATIONAL KBL VICE-CHAIRMAN TONY FLOIRENDO; AND ROGELIO SARMIENTO, A PROMINENT LOCAL BUSINESSMAN, WHOSE FAMILIE NAME IS SYNONOMOUS IN DAVAO WITH VAST WEALTH AND POLITICAL POWER (HIS FATHER, LORENZO, WAS A FORMER CONGRESSMAN FROM DAVAO).

5. THE REMAINDER OF THE KBL SLATE READS LIKE A "WHO'S SHO" OF OLD SOCIETY POLITICIANS. THEY INCLUDE MANUEL GARCIA, FORMER DAVAO CITY COUNCILOR; FELICIDAD SANTOS, FORMER DAVAO CITY COUNCILOR (NO RELATION TO DAVAO CITY MAYOR LUIS SANTOS); TEODORO PALMA GIL, FORMER DAVAO ORIENTAL GOVERNOR; JOSE G. PUYAT, FORMER CONGRESSMAN OF SURIAGAO DEL SUR; JORGE P. ROYECA, FORMER MAYOR OF GENERAL SANTOS CITY; JOSE SISON, FORMER MAYOR OF SURALLAH, SOUTH COTABATO; AND BENJAMIN BAUTISTA, FORMER MAYOR OF MALITA, DAVAO DEL SUR.

6. DESPITE RUNNING UNDER THE COMMON DBL BANNER, PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CANDIDATES HAVE SURFACED. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL REPORTS IN AVAO CITY NEWSPAPERS OF SHARP CONFIDENTIAL

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DISPUTES BETWEEN CANDIDATES OVER ALLOCATION OF CAMPAIGN RESOURCES AND APPOINTMENTS OF CAMPAIGN OFFICIALS. IT IS RUMORED THAT FORMER SENATOR ALMENDRAS HAS DECIDED INDEPENDENTLY TO TRY TO RUN UP THE LARGEST INDIVIDUAL VOTE TALLY, BELIEVING THAT SUCH A TALLY WOULD WIN FOR HIM MORE POWER AND INFLUENCE WITH MARCOS AFTER THE IBP ELECTIONS AND INDICATE TO MARCOS THAT HE (ALMENDRAS) IS A LOCAL POLITICAL POWER TO BE RECKONED WITH.

7. IMELDA'S ROLE. ACCORDING TO LOCAL OPINION, MRS. MARCOS TOOK AN EXTREMELY STRONG INTEREST IN THE SELECTION OF KBL CANDIDATES FOR REGION XI. IT IS BELIEVED THAT DAVAO AREA POLITICAL BOSS TONY FLORIENDO, WHO ACTS AS MRS. MARCOS' HOST WHEN SHE VISITS THE DAVAO AREA AND WHO HAS ACCOMPANIED HER ON SEVERAL OF HER OVERSEAS TRIPS, PERSONALLY CHOSE THE ENTIRE KBL SLATE FOR THE AREA WITH THE ADVICE AND CONSENT OF THE FIRST LADY . IN ONE INSTANCE, IT IS RUMORED, MRS. MARCOS WAS FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO POTENTIAL KBL CANDIDATES, BOTH POLITICALLY AND PERSONALLY CLOSE TO HER: FORMER DAVAO CITY COUNCILOR FELICIDAD SANTOS AND CORNELIO MASKARINO, FORMER DAVAO CITY VICE MAYOR. EVENTUALLY, MRS. MARCOS AND FLOIRENDO CHOSE SANTOS FOR

THE KBL SLOT, WHILE A DISAPPOINTED MASKARINO ENDED UP
LEADING THE "OPPOSITIONIST" SLATE, THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE.

8. THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE - THE OPPOSITION? THE MINDANAO
ALLIANCE OFFERS THE ONLY MEANINGFUL OPPOSITION TO THE KBL
SLATE IN REGION XI. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO LOCAL POLITICAL
OBSERVERS, TO EVEN DESCRIBE THE GROUP AS "OPPOSITION" IS
TO EXAGGERATE ITS ROLE CONSIDERABLY. IN GENERAL, THE
ALLIANCE IS VIEWED THROUGHOUT THE AREA WITH A GREAT DEAL
OF SKEPTICISM. LOCAL OBSERVERS DERISIVELY REFER TO THE
GROUP AS "MARCOS' SECOND TEAM." MUCH OF THE SKEPTICISM
ABOUT THE GROUP CENTERS AROUND THE WIDELY HELD BELIEF
THAT THE HEAD OF THE ALLIANCE SLATE, MASKARINO, ORIGINALLY
FOUGHT STRONGLY TO BE NAMED TO A KBL SLOT.
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9. THE OTHER LEADING MINDANAO ALLIANCE CANDIDATE,
DOMINADOR CARILLO, IS A FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
DELEGATE. IN A CONVERSATION WITH CONSOFF, FORMER CONCON
DELEGATE FROM DAVAO CITY SAMMY OCCENA DESCRIBED CARILLO
AS A MARCOS MAN WHO HAD ORIGINALLY LEFT THE CONSTITUTIONAL
CONVENTION COMMITTED TO VOTING AGAINST THE DOCUMENT (ALONG
WITH OCCENA) BUT, AFTER RETURNING TO DAVAO, SUCCUMBED
TO LOCAL POLITICAL PRESSURE AND VOTED FOR THE CONSTITUTION'S

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ADOPTION. THE REMAINING EIGHT MINDANAO ALLIANCE CANDIDATES ARE POLITICAL NOVICES WHO HAVE ONLY LOCAL POCKETS OF SUPPORT. OF THE TEN MINDANAO ALLIANCE CANDIDATES, IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT IF ANY OF THEM STAND A CHANCE OF WINNING A SEAT IN THE IBP, IT IS MASKARINO OR CARILLO (OR POSSIBLY BOTH).

10. THE CAMPAIGN PLATFORM OF THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE DOES LITTLE TO STRENGTHEN ITS PUBLIC IMAGE AS A TRUE OPPOSITIONIST GROUP. ORIGINALLY, THE ALLIANCE HAD VIRTUALLY NO PUBLIC PLATFORM EXCEPT FOR THE VAGUE CLAIM THAT IT SUPPORTED "A BETTER DEAL FOR MINDANAO." AS THE CAMPAIGN PROGRESSES, THE ALLIANCE HAS COME OUT GRADUALLY IN OPPOSITION TO MARTIAL LAW. ALLIANCE CANDIDATES ARE CAREFUL, HOWEVER, NOT TO TRANSLATE SUCH OPPOSITION INTO ATTACKS ON PRESIDENT MARCOS.

11. MAYOR SANTOS AND THE CAMPAIGN. DAVAO CITY MAYOR LUIS SANTOS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY IGNORED BY FLOIRENDO (AND MRS. MARCOS) IN THE SELECTION OF THE AREA KBL SLATE. IN DISCUSSION OF AREA ELECTION PROSPECTS WITH CONSOFF, SANTOS PROFESSED INDIFFERENCE TO THE CAMPAIGN, BUT IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WAS IRRITATED AT BEING OVERLOOKED AS A POSSIBLE KBL CANDIDATE OR AT LEAST AS ONE OF THE SELECTORS OF KBL CANDIDATES. SANTOS, WHO REPORTEDLY IS WIDELY DISLIKED
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IN DAVAO CITY, TOLD VISITING EMBOFF THAT HE EXPECTED THE VOTERS OF REGION XI TO SPLIT THEIR VOTES AND ELECT A MAJORITY OF THE KBL SLATE, WITH PERHAPS ONE OR TWO OF THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE CANDIDATES WINNING SEATS. LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT OPPOSITION TO LOCAL POLITICIANS, PARTICULARLY MAYOR SANTOS, COULD MANIFEST ITSELF IN AN ANTI-KBL VOTE, ESPECIALLY IN DAVAO CITY. THEY CITE THE RESULTS OF THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM, WHEN DAVAO CITY VOTED ONLY 60 PERCENT "YES" AND A STRONG 40 PERCENT "NO" EMBASSY COMMENT: COMELEC COMMISSIONER YANEZA TOLD EMBOFF MARCH 14 THAT REGION XI ACTUALLY VOTED ONLY 52 PERCENT "YES" IN DECEMBER REFERENDUM AND WORRIED THAT EVEN FIVE PERCENT MORE COULD SCUTTLE THE ENTIRE KBL TICKET (MANILA 4155). END EMBASSY COMMENT.

12. SANTOS' LEADING RIVAL IN DAVAO CITY, FORMER CITY VICE MAYOR MASKARINO WHO APPEARS TO ENJOY WIDE POPULAR SUPPORT HAS SHARPLY DISAGREED WITH THE MAYOR IN THE PAST. IF LOCAL ELECTIONS ARE HELD IN NOVEMBER, MASKARINO IS WIDELY SEEN AS THE LEADING CANDIDATE TO OPPOSE SANTOS IN THE MAYORAL RACE. IN A CONVERSATION WITH CONSOFF, SANTOS CONCEDED THAT MASKARINO HAD A STRONG FOLLOWING IN THE CITY AND WOULD BE A DIFFICULT OPPONENT TO DEFEAT IN A LOCAL ELECTION. VISITING EMBOFF WAS TOLD BY

SEVERAL LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS THAT MAYOR SANTOS IS RUMORED TO BE SECRETLY SUPPORTING THE IBP ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF MASKARINO - BELIEVING THAT IF MASKARINO IS ELECTED TO THE IBP, HE (SANTOS) WOULD STAND A MUCH BETTER CHANCE OF BEING RE-ELECTED MAYOR OF DAVAO.

13. ELECTION PROSPECTS. VIRUTALLY ALL POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN THE DAVAO AREA PREDICT A KBL SWEEP IN REGION XI(THE ONLY NOTABLE EXCEPTION TO THIS BELIEF IS CONFIDENTIAL

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MASKARINO, WHO OPTIMISTICALLY PREDICTED TO VISITING EMBOFF THAT THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE MIGHT TAKE AS MANY AS 6 OF THE 10 SEATS IN THE REGION). DESPITE MASKARINO'S OPTIMISTIC PREDICTION, IT APPEARS THAT THE REAL QUESTION IN REGION XI IS WHETHER THE "OPPOSITION" (THE MINDANAO ALLIANCE) WILL BE ABLE TO WIN EVEN ONE OR TWO SEATS. THIS MIGHT OCCUR, ESPECIALLY IF VOTERS TRANSLATE THEIR DISSATISFACTION WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS INTO AN ANTI-KBL VOTE.

14. COMMENT: THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN REGION XI IS SHAPING UP IN SIMILAR FASHION AS THOSE IN OTHER REGIONS IN THE CONSULATE'S DISTRICT. WHILE THE ELECTION WILL BE FOR MEMBERS OF THE IBP, SEVERAL OF THE CONTESTS WILL BE INDICATORS OF THE STRENGTHS (AND WEAKNESSES) OF LOCAL POLITICAL FACTONS. WHILE THE KBL SLATE MAY SWEEP ALL 10 SEATS IN REGION XI, A HEAVY VOTE FOR INDIVIDUAL OPPOSITIONIST CANDIDATES, SUCH AS MASKARINO, IS A REAL POSSIBILITY. SUCH VOTES, OR ANTI-KBL VOTES IN URBAN AREAS, MAY BE XSEEN BY MARCOS AS A FURTHER INDICATION OF DISSATISFACTION WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL OFFICIALS IN REGION XI AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE. END COMMENT.

15. EMBASSY ADDITION: MANILA PRESS REPORTED MARCH 19 THAT A GRENADE EXPLODED DURING A DAVAO CITY ANNIVERSARY PROGRAM MARCH 16, KILLING ONE SPECTATOR AND INJURING 36. TWO UNEXPLODED GRENADES ALSO WERE FOUND. KBL CANDIDATES AND LOCAL OFFICIALS ON STAGE WERE UNHURT. AP CORRESPONDENT TOLD EMBASSY THAT POLICE HAVE RULED OUT COMMUNIST NPA OR MUSLIM REBEL RESPONSIBILITY. MANILA PRESS ALSO REPORTED MARCH 20 THAT KBL CANDIDATES ALMENDRAS AND PUYAT WERE SLIGHTLY INJURED MARCH 18 WHEN A GRENADE WAS TOSSED AT THEM AND THEY DIVED OFF PLATFORM DURING POLITICAL RALLY IN TAGUM, DAVAO DEL NORTE. GRENADE DID NOT EXPLODE. PRESS NOTES A GRENADE EXPLODED IN A TAGUM THEATRE LAST WEEK INJURING THREE PEOPLE. END EMBASSY COMMENT.
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